



CANADIAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

ENVISIONING A WORLD WHERE PEACE AND JUSTICE PREVAIL

November, 2015

Dear Friend,

I almost didn't write you this. The topic is so surreal and seems so far removed from day-to-day life that I was afraid I might lose you. But that's exactly the problem! So I decided this letter was important.

In April, researchers in China published a paper that shook the scientific community, sparking responses from excitement to total outrage. The Chinese team had edited human embryos using a powerful new process. The goal was to remove the gene responsible for a rare inherited disease.

This research was highly controversial. Many scientific journals refused to publish it, and the work has sparked valuable debate among scientists and ethics experts. *Yet the general public remains largely unaware of the serious risks and the potential benefits of "synthetic biology".*

Synthetic biology brings biology, computer science, and engineering together to *build new forms of life*. This field has a rapidly evolving set of high-powered techniques. Some call it, "genetic engineering on steroids." The public has had no real input on what should be pursued and what should be off limits even though *these questions are more political and cultural than scientific*.

Synthetic biologists plan to go much farther than the Chinese team I mentioned. Many want to make entirely new "designer life-forms", untested by the challenges of time and evolution. Some of these synthetic organisms would be used in labs, others deliberately released into the environment.

Let yourself imagine how our world might look with synthetic yeasts designed to excrete "milk", synthetic shoes that fit your foot like a second skin and repair themselves, synthetic animals made to fulfill a specific task you give them, synthetic medicines and viruses... In good conscience, we must imagine what might go wrong.

Canadian Friends Service Committee has realized that *Quakers can play a unique and important role* as the field of synthetic biology takes shape.

By listening attentively to all, we avoid focusing only on utopian or doomsday scenarios. We draw attention to key issues, like the fragility of ecosystems. *Being motivated by equality and not by profit*, we can help shape fair and precautionary regulation.

This might sound like a huge challenge. It is. But it is absolutely one worth taking on. This isn't just about synthetic biology. In many ways it is about **a "war-on-nature" mentality** that should not go unchecked.

In September, we were invited to a closed **expert working group on synthetic biology** hosted by a United Nations body. Our representative Fred Bass shared Friends' perspectives with key members of the international community, as they laid the basis for decisions on synthetic biology and protecting biological diversity.

Fred told me, "At the beginning I often thought, 'What am I doing here?' Then I realized the value and relevance of the Quaker testimonies of **simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and care for creation**. They guided my thinking and contributions. We Quakers were the only faith-based group. I was pleased with the attention we called to spiritual, social, and ecological aspects of synthetic biology."

This is just one way **your support has made a difference this year**, but to give you even this small glimpse hasn't left me with much space.

I haven't had the chance to write about so many areas of work from supporting the rights of Indigenous peoples and a process of reconciliation to programs for children of mothers in prisons. We have written a **full Annual Report** and I hope you will have a look - <http://report.quakerservice.ca> (feel free to contact our office for a paper copy if you'd like one!)

There are common threads that are true of all the work that donors like you help to realize. It arises from the same values, from the same sense of hope, regardless of the obstacles, and with the same responsiveness to where our efforts are most needed. Often, when the conditions are just right, **this approach leads to major positive shifts in our world**.

I trust you understand this, because you have a vision of a world where peace and justice prevail. Peace is not an end destination but the way we work together. **Please make a donation today to help this work continue. Thank you for your trust and vision.**

In Friendship,



Lana Robinson

Clerk, Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

P.S. There is an urgent need for new monthly donors. This type of giving is easy to setup online or directly from your bank account. Why not let us know how we can help you become a monthly donor?